

California Department of Education
Jack O'Connell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction



Elementary Education Newsletter

Inside this issue:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Greetings From the Superintendent | 1 |
| • <i>On the Right Track 5 Symposium</i> | 2 |
| • North Tamarind Elementary School | 3 |
| • San Rafael Elementary School | 4 |
| • Achievement Gap Summit | 5 |
| • Experience in Motion | 6 |
| • Calendar of Events | 7 |
| • Resources | 8 |

Greetings From the Superintendent...

This issue of the *Elementary Education Newsletter* addresses topics for the fall months and beyond. The articles in this edition focus on the *On the Right Track 5 Symposium*, profiles of schools that have successfully exited Program Improvement, the Achievement Gap Summit, and resources to improve student achievement.

This year I will lead an intensive effort to find ways to close the achievement gap that exists between successful students who are often white or Asian and financially well off, and struggling students who are too often poor, Hispanic, African American, or disabled. I will continue to work with educators, researchers, business leaders, and other experts to find strategies that work and also visit schools that are beating the odds and successfully closing the gap.

The statewide P-16 Council has been given the task to develop a comprehensive plan to narrow the achievement gap. The P-16 Council includes a regionally diverse group of educators, business leaders, preschool experts, college presidents, parents, librarians, and others committed to effective school reform. A statewide summit focused on closing the achievement gap will be held November 13-14, 2007, in Sacramento. It is my

goal to work with leaders in higher education to make sure that educational programs preparing new teachers for the classroom are better linked to California's rigorous academic standards and the needs of California's diverse student population.

Too often, the struggles of the African American student, the English learner, and the learning-disabled student were hidden by overall school achievement gains. That day is past. Today we are holding ourselves accountable for all children. When we see significant groups of students falling far short of the goal of proficiency that we hold for all students, we must act. Today, equipped with specific knowledge of those gaps, we must focus as never before on solutions.

Last spring I announced the launching of the California School Service Award Program. Classified employees play key roles in creating a school environment that promotes student achievement, children's safety, and health. I often say classified employees are the glue that holds our schools together.

Continued on Page 2

**Greetings From the Superintendent
(Continued)**

Only employees at elementary schools will be eligible for the first year (2008). All public school service employees will be eligible in subsequent years. The nomination process for 2008 will start at the district level where each elementary or unified school district will select one employee in each of four categories to be nominated. The four categories are food service, maintenance operations and transportation, paraeducator and instructional assistance, and office and special services. The nominees will be submitted to the California Department of Education (CDE) in October. Two semifinalists in each category will be announced by committees. I will announce the winners in January and host an awards luncheon for them in February.

The award program is sponsored by the CDE in partnership with the California School Employees Association, Service Employees International Union, California Teachers Association, California Federation of Teachers, Association of California School Administrators, and business and industry organizations.

We honor teachers with the California Teachers of the Year award, and we honor schools with the Academic Achievement and Distinguished School awards. It is time we honor our classified employees as well.

JACK O'CONNELL

**On the Right Track 5 Symposium – Navigating through
Program Improvement and Strategies for Exiting**

The District and School Program Coordination Office at the California Department of Education and the California Comprehensive Center at WestEd will hold the fifth annual On the Right Track (OTRT5) symposium in Anaheim, California, at the Hyatt Regency in Orange County on September 30 – October 2, 2007. The purpose of the OTRT 5 symposium is to provide an opportunity for school and district teams in the early stages of their reform initiatives to interact with and learn from schools that have successfully developed strategies to improve student achievement. This year the OTRT 5 will feature

Dr. Libia Gil as the keynote speaker. She joined American Institute for Research in 2004 when it merged with New American Schools, where she served as chief academic officer. Dr Gil provides senior counsel on leadership development initiatives and assists states and districts in developing strategies for improving student achievement by bridging research evidence with practice evidence. The program on Sunday, September 30, 2007, will also include a presentation called BUZZ, from Brooke Haycock a one woman show about the pursuit of hope and success in America's high-poverty, high-minority high schools. Dr. Janet Zadina will be the featured speaker on Monday afternoon to provide information on brain research, language, learning, and the achievement gap.

The OTRT 5 symposium will include presentations from nine schools that recently exited Program Improvement (PI), two school districts that exited PI, and one school district that helped its schools to exit PI. Schools and districts will send teams to serve as presenters and have been asked to tell the story of how they have improved student achievement by sharing strategies and techniques that other schools and districts can replicate. This year North Tamarind Elementary School in the Fontana Unified School District and San Rafael Elementary School in the Pasadena Unified School District were selected to serve as two of the presenting schools at the symposium. Presenters will include the following information in their presentations:

- A description of their students in terms of their academic achievement, demographic information, the school climate and culture, parental involvement, professional development, and challenges faced along the way when the reform initiative began.

Continued on Page 3

***On the Right Track 5 Symposium – Navigating through
Program Improvement and Strategies for Exiting
(Continued)***

- What they did to improve student achievement including steps they took to implement standards-aligned curriculum, utilize data to meet the needs of students, realign fiscal resources to support program goals, as well as any professional development to which they attribute their school's/district's success.
- Three key factors that led to success of the school district.

A list of the schools and districts profiled at the conference and honored for their success will be posted at the CDE Virtual Library Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl/improvingchs.asp>. School profiles will be posted later this fall at that Web site as a resource to schools seeking strategies to improve student academic achievement.

North Tamarind Elementary School

Jason Angle, the principal, started working at North Tamarind Elementary School in the Fontana Unified School District when it was identified in year four of Program Improvement. North Tamarind was in decile two of the Academic Performance Index when reform initiatives began. The results of the California Standards Test (CST) administered in 2004 indicated that only 10 percent of the English learners (ELs) scored at or above the proficient level in English language arts (ELA). The EL subgroup did not meet the annual measurable objective of 13.6 percent. North Tamarind was required to write an alternative governance plan and advised of possible sanctions that could be put into place if test scores did not improve to meet the new requirement of 24.4 percent proficient in ELA on the CST. Staff morale was low at that time.

The first thing the North Tamarind staff members did was to carefully examine their practices to look for possible actions that could be taken to improve their EL scores. The school district staff recommended that the school participate with several other schools in the Vision, Innovation, and Power: Schools on the Move program (VIP) offered by the San Bernardino County Office of Education. A committee of six teachers and two administrators attended meetings and training sessions designed to help the school analyze data, identify needs, and implement best teaching practices for success. The practices included checking for understanding, questioning students at higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, and utilizing Marzano's instructional strategies.

North Tamarind utilized EduSoft and the District Multiple Measures matrix to categorize students by proficiency. Special emphasis was placed on identifying particular strengths and weaknesses. Strategies were developed and meetings conducted with the Title I support teacher, English-language development (ELD) support teacher, the Reading First coach, and regular classroom teachers to meet the needs of individual students. The principal and instructional support staff meet with targeted students at least once a week to provide specific instruction in the identified areas as well as to build up the students' test-taking strategies, reasoning skills, etc. Students are also provided with focused attention on areas to improve specific skills during their ELD period and the after-school program.

The percentage of EL students passing the ELA portion of the CST has nearly tripled from 10 percent to 29.5 percent during a two-year period. The schoolwide percentage of students passing the CST in ELA has nearly doubled from 17.4 percent to 34 percent. The mathematics scores also increased from 26 percent passing to 42 percent even though the school did not focus on this area. The API has increased over the past two years from 626 to 710.

Continued on Page 4

**North Tamarind Elementary School
(Continued)**

North Tamarind has a cohesive staff and all of the teachers have remained at the school during the reform initiative. The school implemented a number of changes in the delivery of its instructional program that resulted in improvement in student achievement. Full and faithful implementation of the Open Court Reading (OCR) program was the major instructional focus for the 2004-05 school year. Teachers were held accountable for teaching the Open Court curriculum in their evaluations, and administrators conducted frequent “walk-throughs” in classrooms to monitor its implementation. Hampton Brown materials were not aligned to the standards so lessons were developed that focused on the ELD standards. An ELD period was implemented schoolwide from 7:56 a.m. to 8:49 a.m., which increased the 38 minutes specified by the district to 53 minutes. Students are provided with ELD instruction four days each week. The additional 15 minutes added to the ELD block is used to frontload concepts and vocabulary being taught in OCR. An instructional support teacher was hired to provide model lessons and to assist teachers to write lesson plans using the ELD standards to ensure that one key standard is taught per week.

A purposeful after-school program was implemented to provide six-week courses to target skills identified by test data as those with which students were struggling. Interventions at the school are data-driven and built around the needs of individual students. Groups are then formed with students who have similar needs to improve specific skill areas.

The staff members at North Tamarind have established professional learning communities and conduct grade-level meetings focused on analyzing data on minimum days at least twice each month. Richard DuFour’s book, *Building Professional Learning Communities*, was purchased for all staff members for training purposes. Teachers meet with the reading coach every two months to analyze their assessment data to plan strategies to provide better instruction. Grade-level meetings were focused on the following six phases:

- Phase 1: Build a Knowledge Base
- Phase 2: Observe Models and Examples
- Phase 3: Reflect on Practice
- Phase 4: Change Practice
- Phase 5: Gain and Share Expertise
- Phase 6: Plan What’s Next

Principal Angle indicated the three main factors key to Tamarind’s success:

- There is a shared vision at the school that all students come to school to learn and become better people.
- Teachers are professional and dedicated in doing whatever it takes to raise student achievement.
- The staff looks at individual achievement and recommends interventions.

San Rafael Elementary School

San Rafael Elementary School in the Pasadena Unified School District has experienced a high turnover in administrative staff, with four different principals in five years. During the five years, staff morale declined and teacher transfers increased due to the lack of continuity in the administrative staff. The school experienced a revolving door among its teachers and principals. San Rafael staff did not have a clearly articulated vision or mission. The staff did not analyze data to improve student achievement and lacked strategies to provide effective instruction for English learners (ELs). At that time neither the school nor the district had implemented

Continued on Page 5

**San Rafael Elementary School
(Continued)**

an adopted standardized curriculum. The curriculum was “hit or miss”, not aligned to academic content standards. There was no sense of accountability. Twenty percent of the teachers at the school had emergency credentials and were not highly qualified. Many of the students within the school’s attendance area came from foster homes and posed challenges in terms of managing behavior problems. A significant number of special education students enrolled in the school are fully included in regular education classrooms.

Alyson Beecher became the principal of the school during 2006 and has been there for one year. She worked as the district special education coordinator for 13 years prior to her assignment as principal of San Rafael. Los Angeles Unified School District implemented Open Court Reading (OCR) in 2003. Teachers at San Rafael became more diligent about improving the quality of their reading/ language arts instruction because the school district also developed a system to monitor program implementation. Teams were established by the school district consisting of six to ten people to include principals from other schools, resource teachers, the deputy superintendent, and the school site principal to conduct “walk-throughs” in classrooms two times per year to ensure that OCR was being fully implemented with integrity. The site principal meets with the team for debriefing following the “walk-throughs” to provide recommendations to improve the delivery of instruction. Alyson continued the “walk-throughs” to monitor program implementation. She provided teachers with feedback from her “walk-throughs” and kept documentation about what she observed. Principals received training from the district on how to provide teachers with feedback, focusing on data, coaching strategies, and how to provide support in English language arts. The school district also provided literacy coaches for each school, supported from district funding 75 percent and from the school Title I funds 25 percent. Pacing guides were implemented throughout the district, and implementation was also monitored. OCR is taught daily at the same time, in a two-hour block uninterrupted in kindergarten through grade four.

Data drive the instructional program and are used to develop plans to improve student achievement and strategies to improve the instructional program. The staff uses *Edugenuity*, a Web-based program for analyzing data. The staff also uses *Lesson Study* to address “Here’s what the data are showing us”, and teachers spend time figuring out how to provide effective instruction by looking at specific skills and tweaking instructional practices.

San Rafael has successfully exited PI and has continued to improve the quality of instruction. Alyson Beecher indicated the following factors to their school’s success:

- Building a strong team
- Implementing a unified, well-supported district curriculum aligned to standards
- Looking at data
- Implementing pacing guides

The principal feels that staff members are learning more every year, trying to become more consistent, and that they are moving in the right direction.

Achievement Gap Summit

The Achievement Gap Summit sponsored by the California Department of Education will be held at the Sacramento Convention Center on November 13 – 14, 2007. The summit will bring together educators from across the state to address a major crisis facing public schools in California and throughout the nation: the systemic gap between our highest- and lowest-performing students. The program will feature several keynote

Continued on Page 6

Achievement Gap Summit (Continued)

speakers: Tavis Smiley, Douglas Reeves, Chester Finn, Richard Rothstein, as well as many other featured speakers. The program schedule, registration information, a list of speakers and their biographical sketches, and a description of all of the breakout sessions are posted at <http://www.sjcoe.org/summit/eventschedule.aspx>. In an effort to narrow this achievement gap, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and others are invited to hear from experts as well as to propose workable solutions for improving academic achievement for all students. This issue is critical for Californians. Please join us in this coordinated effort to improve student achievement at all levels and to eliminate the achievement gap.

For additional information about the achievement gap or to view Jack O'Connell's State of Education Address, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/se/yr07soe.asp>.

“Experience In Motion”



In March 2007 Siemens Transportation Systems launched “*Experience In Motion*,” a pilot science literacy program to demonstrate to students how mathematics and science apply to everyday life. This unique program has provided students in grades four, five, and six at Carroll Elementary School in the Elk Grove Unified School District with experiences that give them a real-life connection to science and the high-tech industries that use basic science every day. Governor Schwarzenegger, State Schools Chief Jack O'Connell, and business leaders throughout the state are encouraging schools to provide students with a stronger foundation in mathematics, science, and vocational skills to close the achievement gap by better preparing students for college and technical careers. Siemens

Transportation Systems has taken a leadership role to create a program that embodies a vocational perspective to assist teachers and business leaders to build a pipeline of informed and prepared students. Siemens has formed a coalition with the Sacramento County Office of Education, the Elk Grove Unified School District, Linking Education and Economic Development, Teichert Construction, and Explorit to help California students learn problem-solving skills relevant to the transportation industry. The project has also established a curriculum template for other science-based businesses and schools to follow to establish similar partnerships.

The main objective of the program is to demystify the teaching of the sciences, such as physics, and to establish partnerships with local experts in the hi-tech industries that use basic science every day. Eighty students and their teachers toured the Siemens Transportation Systems facility in Sacramento, California, to see firsthand how trains are built for light-rail systems all over the world.

Paul Hauder, the principal of Carroll Elementary School, stated that he was excited about having this connection with business leaders to establish an active partnership with professionals in the transportation industry. The principal was also pleased that students had hands-on experiences to learn more about motion and movement, physics, magnetism, and electricity. He felt that participation in the project was a tremendous boost to improvement in student achievement.

After students visited the Siemens Transportation Systems facility to have a first-hand experience to learn about how the trains are built, learning activities were extended to their classrooms. Scientists and engineers from Siemens Transportation Systems provided four follow-up visits to the classrooms and taught lessons in

Continued on Page 7

“Experience In Motion”
(Continued)

mathematics and science that were aligned with the academic content standards. The culminating activity for the “*Experience In Motion*” project at Carroll Elementary School was a display of student work during the Spring Fling and Open House.

Calendar of Events

October

October 25–28, 2007

[California Science Teachers Association](#)

California Science Education Conference

Long Beach Convention Center, Long Beach, California

Jessica Lewis or Jenna Bellato, conference@cascience.org, 916-979-7004

November

November 1–4, 2007

[Association of Mexican American Educators](#)

Motivating Latino Students to Achieve Excellence

Radisson Hotel, Santa Maria, California

Dana Valverde, sefeliz@aol.com, 805-938-9830

November 2–4, 2007

[California Mathematics Council](#)

Annual Conference

Palm Springs Convention Center, Palm Springs, California

Mike Contino, cmc-math@sbcglobal.net, 888-262-6284

November 13-14, 2007

California Department of Education

Achievement Gap Summit

Sacramento Convention Center, Sacramento, California

Christine Texeira, ctexeira@sjcoe.net, 209-468-9255

November 13-16, 2007

California Department of Education (Child Development Division),

First 5 California, and Butte County Office of Education

13th Annual Migrant Education Even Start (MEES) Conference

Holiday Inn Capitol Plaza, Sacramento, California

Adriana Simmons, asimmons@bcoe.org, 916-443-9225

November 29–December 2, 2007

[California Mathematics Council](#)

50th Annual Mathematics Conference

Asilomar Conference Center, Pacific Grove, California

Mike Contino, cmc-math@sbcglobal.net, 888-262-6284

Resources

Programmatic and fiscal resources to build, implement, and sustain the quality of before-and-after school programs, including school-age care and other out-of-school opportunities for children and youths, are posted on the California Department of Education (CDE) Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ba>.

The CDE offers information regarding student testing on its Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr>.

The CDE also offers information regarding curriculum frameworks, the adoption cycle for instructional materials for kindergarten through grade eight, and the academic content standards on its Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/index.asp>.

Check It Out! is a publication designed to help school districts and schools assess the state of their school libraries and the policies that support and guide them. The guide is posted on the CDE Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/lb/checkitout.asp>.

The 2007 *Educational Resources Catalog* is available on the CDE Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/rc>. The catalog includes descriptions of CDE publications and resources and information on how to order the documents.

The National Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) has posted several resources for parents and educators Web site: <http://www.pta.org>. The PTA magazine, *Our Children*, provides parents with resources and information about how to make households, neighborhoods, schools, and communities better places for children. The newsletter is posted on the PTA Web site at http://www.pta.org/pr_our_children_magazine.html and is written in English and in Spanish.

Answers to frequently asked questions about pandemic flu provide information about how schools can prepare for a possible pandemic, are posted on the CDE Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls>.

The United States government has posted information on its Web site at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov> about avian and pandemic flu to help people to become informed and prepared. The resources include checklists, questions and answers, and general information about pandemic flu.

The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) has prepared a 35-minute briefing on a DVD titled *Pandemic Influenza Preparedness in California* that provides important and timely information on the threat of avian influenza and the risk of a human influenza pandemic. Information about the briefing is posted on the CDHS Web site at <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/dcdc/izgroup/pandemic.htm>.

The Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section of CDHS has introduced a "Harvest of the Month" tool kit to encourage students to increase their consumption of a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables and engage in physical activity every day. The "Harvest of the Month" tool kit is available on the CDHS Web site at <http://www.harvestofthemonth.com>.

The California School Garden Network provides resources for schools about how to create and sustain school gardens on its Web site at <http://www.csqn.org>.

Continued on Page 9

**Resources
(Continued)**

The California Children's 5 a Day—Power Play! campaign works to educate, motivate, and empower children ages nine to eleven to eat fruits and vegetables and be physically active. The campaign produces a variety of materials that are research-based, educator-friendly, and appealing to children. Schools with at least 50 percent of their students enrolled in the free and reduced-price meal program can request free copies of the campaign's educational and promotional materials through their 5 a Day—Power Play! campaign regional coordinator. To locate your regional coordinator, visit the California 5 a Day—Power Play! Web site at <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/cdic/cpns/network/rnn.htm>. Materials include printed copies of the "School Idea and Resource Kits" for fourth and fifth grades and student workbooks for each participating student as well as the **Community Youth Organization Idea and Resource Kit** for after-school and summer programs. The kits may also be downloaded at http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/cdic/cpns/powerplay/pp_resources.htm. They will soon be available for purchase by schools that do not qualify for free copies of the materials.

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